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ABSTRACT

A literature teacher used high interest paperback books to develop the educational skills and improve the attitudes of unmotivated students. By introducing new books with guides stressing personal reasoning and values clarification over correct answers, the teacher helped build students' confidence in their own thinking ability. She pushed students to recognize relationships in print through further study guides and increased student interest with enrichment activities. When reading "Secrets of the Shopping Mall," for example, students studied the feasibility of teenagers being able to survive undetected in their own local mall. The instructor guided students through composition assignments with carefully considered prewriting exercises. Relying heavily on peer tutoring, group work, and school resources, and permitting oral or taped as well as written reports, the teacher developed a course that made reluctant students into more interested readers, thinkers, and writers. (MM)

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FOSTERING POSITIVE READERS AND THINKERS FROM NEGATIVE STUDENTS

Elise H. Broening

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FOSTERING POSITIVE READERS AND THINKERS FROM NEGATIVE STUDENTS

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My presentation will be a three-pronged approach.

First, a brief history of the development of our senior high school program to provide for our negative students. Second, the major purpose or objectives and finally, some examples of my specific teaching strategies and their applications.

The English Department decided that we needed a literature class for our below regents, often below average students, who had demonstrated basic competency in reading ability but who were "turned off" by more traditional English classes. The student who says, "Who cares"--"Make me"--or at best, "What's the lowest grade I can get in this class and still pass?" All schools have these students, and we all need ways to foster both educational skills and positive self attitudes. Our targeted group then became those who had successfully completed the mandated New York State Regents Competency Test in Reading and were only interested in our district's class credit requirements for graduation eligibility. We do enroll seniors who have failed to take the RCT Reading Exam for one reason or another, out-of-state transfers or those who simply failed to report to the exam.

With 95-100% qualifying in state reading competency our program now was required to meet our district's philosophy. Johnson City is a mastery--outcomed based system. Our basic premise is that most students are capable of learning what we want if first we teach it and not just assign it and second sufficient time and corrective intervention are provided along the way. Our course aim then became confidence for students and confidence meant success in reading and in thinking. The course is called Current Literature, and we read paperbacked books that resulted in movies and television productions. I have used Summer of My German Soldier, Witness for the Prosecution,

Farewell to Manzanar, to name a few. Selections were chosen for interest and not by readability formulas. I wanted them to enjoy what they read. I didn't use, for example, Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment. Crime and Punishment was a P.B.S. production several years ago.

Now to the nuts and bolts. What exactly do I do and why? What turns the shrugging shoulders' students into readers and thinkers?

I begin by helping them to realize how much they really do know. Often they enter believing that they are defeated as I begin to distribute the first book. One method I use to cue set, or introduce, a literary selection is a prediction guide. These guides from the Herber-Nelson Reading in the Content Areas usually provide students with a reading focus. Since they work in small groups first, no one is embarrassed by any improper response and also, since no one response is totally correct or totally wrong, there seems to be safety in at least trying to answer and in explaining their personal reasonings.

E. Broening

THE WAVE

Prediction/Reaction Guide

Concept: Discovery of people's reactions to group pressures

Directions: Part A - Check those statements which you believe to be generally true based upon your own knowledge and previous reading experiences. Be able to support your ideas with specific references.

Part B - Re-read each statement after having read the full book. Check those statements which the author would generally accept. Be able to support your ideas with specific references from the book.

1. The least intelligent members of a group can be led to rebel against traditional values.
2. It can often be dangerous to go against the crowd.
3. The best of intentions can produce the wrong results.
4. It is difficult to judge others until you live as they do.
5. A strong leader can usually be successful in forcing his/her will on others.

6. A "weak" person is an easy follower.
7. Learning the truth can often be painful.
8. When we consider others as we do ourselves, we rarely make mistakes in judgment.
9. All members of a group must think alike for the group to be successful.
10. All successful groups have a strong leader.
11. Members of a group should not question the motives of their leader.

Still another method for beginning is to list key words from the book on the board and discuss their various meanings. Now, as students read, they are thinking about their definitions and the author's use of the words.

Another R.C.A. guide is a Patterns of Organization guide. Again group work but now the purpose is to recognize relationships in print and the text must be used as supportive evidence.

E. Broening

THE GIRL WHO HAD NO NAME (NEED TO BELONG)
PATTERNS OF ORGANIZATION (CAUSE/EFFECT)

CHAPTERS 1 - 2 PP. 1-21 - EVENTS THAT LEAD TO GIRLIE'S FIRST MOVE

PART I

DIRECTIONS: HERE ARE SETS OF PHRASES. THE TWO PHRASES ON EACH LINE SEPARATED BY A SLANTED LINE ARE POSSIBLE CAUSE AND EFFECT RELATIONSHIPS. CHECK IF THE FIRST PHRASE CAUSES THE SECOND PHRASE. WORK TOGETHER AND BE PREPARED TO SUPPORT YOUR CHOICES.

- ___ 1. The whispering / driving Girlie crazy
- ___ 2. Papa smoked / Girlie felt she could smoke
- ___ 3. Nita planning to tattle on Girlie / Girlie wanted to fight
- ___ 4. Mama died of dreadful disease / Papa buried her in Sand Hill
- ___ 5. Solving her problems / running away with excuses

- ___ 6. Galen fired and leaving / Darnella leaving home
- ___ 7. Papa wanted and needed Girlie / she would manage to please him
- ___ 8. Papa gave the orders / Girlie packed to leave
- ___ 9. Lil went without food / Symond asked help from Molly
- ___ 10. Girlie left at Lil's / Papa needed time to think

PART II

DIRECTIONS: READ EACH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS AND CHECK THOSE YOU BELIEVE TO BE GENERALLY REASONABLE. CONSIDER THE WORK YOU DID IN I ABOVE AND THE CHAPTERS IN THE NOVEL.

- ___ 1. Not knowing the truth often leads to incorrect conclusions.
- ___ 2. Careful reasoning may help a person to understand the facts.
- ___ 3. Wanting to be needed is the same as being needed.
- ___ 4. Temper tantrums often result in disaster.
- ___ 5. Some people want to be isolated.

To help in the reasoning process for particularly difficult or complex chapters or small sections, I often use a Three Level guide.

E. Broening FAREWELL TO MANZANAR THREE-LEVEL GUIDE

ORGANIZING IDEA: A person may have more than one loyalty at one time.

Chapters 7, pg. 43 - 46.

I. LITERAL

DIRECTIONS: Check those statements which say what the author says. The statements may use the same words as the author or they may use different words but say the same thing. Be prepared to give reasons for your choices.

- ___ 1. Mr. Wakatsuki came from Hiroshima, Japan.
- ___ 2. He said that military men make wars.
- ___ 3. "America, of course, ... will win."

- _____ 4. Japan was still his country.
- _____ 5. Mr. Wakatsuki lived in the United States longer than the Fort Lincoln interviewer.
- _____ 6. He had ten children.

II. INTERPRETIVE

DIRECTIONS: Check those statements you feel tell what the author means. Be prepared to support your choices with information from the reading.

- _____ 1. Mr. Wakatsuki did not enjoy military life.
- _____ 2. He believed that there would always be wars.
- _____ 3. The Japanese were good fighters, but the Americans had more supplies.
- _____ 4. Mr. Wakatsuki had family ties both in Japan and in America.
- _____ 5. After all these years, Mr. Wakatsuki was still not an American citizen.
- _____ 6. Mr. Wakatsuki compares countries at war to family members fighting.

III. APPLIED

DIRECTIONS: Based on your reading and personal experience, check those statements which you believe are generally true. Be prepared to support your choices.

- _____ 1. No man can serve two masters.
- _____ 2. Actions speak louder than words.
- _____ 3. Loyalty is something you can measure.
- _____ 4. Loyalty to one side implies that the other view is wrong.

I have learned to take advantage of all available resources. When reading Farewell to Manzanar some students researched periodical accounts of the Japanese Internment during World War II. Their research became a comparison with the literary account as either oral or written reports.

Reading The Wave provided an opportunity to interview our social studies department involved in the teaching of a course called Nazi Germany.

In Secrets of the Shopping Mall, some did a feasibility study of a teenager group surviving undetected in our own local mall. You might be interested to know that in fiction it is possible but in real life it simply could not be success-

fully achieved. At least not in our mall.

If reading and writing do enhance one another, then writing help is also essential. As in reading/thinking, writing requires direction. One strategy is to provide the set pattern for writing.

E. Broening

THE GIRL WHO HAD NO NAME (COMPOSITION PROCESS)

A PROCESS FOR ORGANIZING YOUR NOVEL COMPOSITION

- I. List four or five examples from the novel to demonstrate (show) Girlie's loss of temper and tell the results.
Example: Girlie caught smoking and reprimanded by Nita
Results: Fights with Nita and both caught by Wanda
- II. Consider if control is necessary or not
- III. State your stand (point of view) in a clear and forceful sentence
- IV. Select two or three good examples from I above and show how your stand (point of view) results in maturity.

This prewriting does require extra time as no actual writing can be started until this work has been completed and checked by the teacher. In the long run, it does save teacher correction time. The final copy is usually far superior to the just let students write approach or even just assigning a general topic. Guiding is a method of helping them to be successful.

Students in Current Literature become readers, thinkers and yes, even writers. I rely heavily on peer tutoring, group work and easily accessible school resources. Students may select to report orally, even on tape, or through written reports. Often a group selects key scenes in a novel, assigns parts and acts it out for the rest of the class. To do this, they must read and think about which scenes are significant to major themes in the book, select their cast and be able to read aloud.

Am I successful? Yes, I believe that I am. To support my position, I use the following. One boy in class during

our reading of Something for Joey requested a special report. It seemed his younger brother, too, was a victim of leukemia and my student felt jealous of his parents' attentions to the younger son. My senior decided to compare his situation with the book, and he came to the conclusion that he had been able to adjust his own personal feelings from his reading and that the book often glossed over some serious family problems in just such a difficult situation.

Over the summer I was shopping in our local mall and a former student, now a salesperson, asked me if I knew how he spent his break and lunch times? When I responded in the negative, he said that he buys one paperbacked book every two weeks and uses his break-lunch times by going across the hallway to Burger King to eat and to read. He is working through all of Agatha Christie's mysteries where he reports, by using the reading-thinking skills from class (he said what he learned about reading for clues in novels), he has been successful in out guessing the ending nine times out of ten.

I think that we have been successful in turning some of our negative students into readers and thinkers.

Thank you.